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<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5399-6003> (2017) Who am I, and who are you?
Identity, engagement and collaboration in the era of online nursing research.
In: RCN International Nursing Research Conference 2017, 05 April 2017 -
07 April 2017, University of Oxford.

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Version: Accepted Version

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SYMPOSIUM PROPOSAL
ABSTRACT ACCEPTED 9th DECEMBER 2016

RCN International Nursing Research conference and exhibition, 5-7 April 2017 (Oxford)

Symposium title

Who am I, and who are you? Identity, engagement and collaboration in the era of online nursing research

Presenters

Dr Nigel Cox

Dr Eula Miller (with Dr Karen Wright)

Pr Carol Haigh

Abstract statement demonstrating how the papers link together (max 300 words)

This symposium addresses the theory and practice of digital, online nursing research. Collectively, the papers acknowledge the emergence of service user or patient voice as a service delivery philosophy and modality, a standpoint which is also reflected in the movement towards collaborative and co-creative research methodologies. Individually, each paper problematizes the nature of personal identity in online research and, in different ways, asks the question: 'Who am I, and who are you?'. Each paper frames this question differently in order to create a discussion about the different ways it might be answered.

The opening paper by Cox, a nurse/healthcare researcher and anthropologist, considers three theoretical standpoints: how the 'online self' is governed (by people or researchers), how people are classified (or classify themselves), and the ritualistic nature of ethical risk assessment processes.

The second paper by Miller and Wright, nurse researchers and mental health practitioners, aims to provoke critical interrogation and reflection upon potential issues that may occur when engaging and collaborating in online research with individuals who are coping/living with mental ill-health.

The closing paper by Haigh, a nurse researcher and leader in healthcare ethics, gathers together and integrates Cox's consideration of identity and ritual and Miller's exposition of fractured reality in order to progress discussion about the the online self, personality disguise, and matters of governance.

These emerging theoretical standpoints and practical contexts for nursing research present challenges for service users/patients, researchers, ethicists, and their sponsors. This symposium will be of interest to researchers and practitioners interested in advancing online methodologies, people working with vulnerable or hard-to-reach populations, and people working in the field of research governance.

[272 words]

PAPER 1

Title

Governing the online self: the accomplishment of identity in online nursing research

Author

Dr Nigel Cox, Senior Lecturer, Department of Nursing, Manchester Metropolitan University

Abstract

With a focus upon how people represent their identities in online nursing research, this paper will provide an opportunity for critical debate about the theoretical concepts and methodological concerns that frame research in virtual or digital environments. The presentation will employ three theoretical standpoints: the governing of the 'online self', the interaction between researcher-defined and participant-chosen classifications, and the ritualistic nature of ethical risk assessment processes.

The first standpoint, 'governing' (Rose, 1998), considers how people are made 'visible' to researchers through the guidelines and processes used in research practice. These techniques incite or oblige people - researchers and participants - to behave and act in particular ways. The paper will explore this theoretical standpoint and apply it to nursing research conducted in the online environment.

The second standpoint, 'classifying' (Hacking, 2007), considers how people become subjects of professional knowledge, and how people interact with the classifications conferred upon them by others. In the online environment, this is of critical importance in circumstances where the well-being of the 'self' is central, for instance for people identifying the mental health concerns of themselves or others.

A final standpoint, 'rituals and risk' (Douglas, 2002) considers how researchers identify and navigate the risks of the online encounter. Anthropological theory can show how ethical checklists can help to identify risk and so protect people from harm. However, we may need to consider how risk-managing rituals might also obscure the very people we are aiming to protect.

Summarising, this paper will note how online research provides a venue for identity negotiation, brokerage and accomplishment. In doing so, discussion will be invited about how the research encounter is theoretically framed, and how nursing practice in methodology and ethics may need to continually adapt to the challenges and innovations of online research.

[292 words]

References

1. Rose, N. (1998). *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. Hacking, I. (2007). *Kinds of People: Moving targets*. *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 151, 285–318.
3. Douglas, M. (2002). *Purity and Danger (Routledge Classics Edition)*. London: Routledge.

PAPER 2

Title

Fractured realities: navigating the online research terrain with participants managing mental ill-health

Authors

Dr Eula Miller, Senior Lecturer, Department of Nursing, Manchester Metropolitan University

Dr Karen Wright, Head of School of Nursing, University of Central Lancashire

Abstract

This aim of this presentation is to provoke critical interrogation and reflection upon issues that may occur when engaging in online research with individuals who are coping/living with mental ill-health. Although the benefits of working collaboratively with such individuals is well documented (Ramon, 2000), the complexities and intricacies are less well-voiced within research literature (Helchem, 2012), specifically when exploring online research engagement.

Through the use of case studies and vignettes, the issues presented will promote deliberation and focus upon how engaging in online research can present issues unique to this client/patient group. Consideration of such are deemed important, as if left unchecked can fracture the relationship dynamic between the researcher and participant, and the research process, (Rose, 2003).

Additionally, as mental health service users may choose to disengage with services, so too, may they choose to disengage with research. A crucial difference here is that mental health workers have a duty of care to the service user and can assertively seek to re-engage them out of concern for their wellbeing. The researcher, however, must respect a participants' decision to opt out of the research and have no way of knowing if they have been adversely affected by the research experience.

By addressing such issues through raising awareness and understanding of the same, it is hoped that stakeholders engaged in such situations will enhance their ability to navigate ethically and morally the research terrain and encounter the least disruption to researcher-participant relationships when working with people living with mental ill-health (NIHR, 2013), the research process, and research outputs.

[257 words]

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- Ramon, S. (2000) Participative mental health research: users and professional researchers working together. *Mental Health Care*, 3, 7, 224-228.
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PAPER 3

Title

You don't see me, you don't know me: the ethical issues surrounding cyber-space research

Author

Professor Carol Haigh, Department of Nursing, Manchester Metropolitan University

Abstract

Following on from Cox's consideration of consensus reality and Miller's exposition of fracture reality, this paper explores the concept of immersion of self in cyber-reality from the perspective of personality disguise.

Many of the concerns that exercise cyber-ethicists are those of real world research, Concepts such as ensuring confidentiality and privacy of respondents, gathering informed consent from participants and the prevention of harm (Jankowski and van Slem, 2006). That these are issues of joint concern to both techno and real world researchers is conceded, however certain issues require greater consideration in cyber-space than was generally expected from real world human subject research.

Concealment of real world identity in virtual settings is a common practice and as one moves progressively through the layers of cyberspace real world identities become more obscured. Physical attributes, age, sex and gender are unclear and lack of certainty regarding individual 'real world' characteristics presents quite obvious problems to the researcher. Concealment may include strategies such as gender switching (Suler 2002), the use of pseudonyms (Bruckman, 2002) or the use of Avatars.

As with other forms of research, the aim of techno-research is to protect the well-being of the subject by minimising risks. The integrity of the research depends upon this and validity of the research depends upon the reliability and veracity of the data and the extent to which that data can be linked to a specific persona. The peculiar intimate nature of online interaction, coupled with the disinhibiting effect that is initiated when one cannot see the reaction of one's statements (the "you can't see me, you don't know me" phenomenon), rendering some areas of cyberspace potentially risky to both the well-being of participants and the integrity of the research.

This paper explores these issues through the lens of personality construction and cyber-space immersion.

[299 words]

References

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